

Sustainable Commuter Benefits Package Offers Nondriving Incentives for Workers

As rising fuel costs spark the commuting public's interest in transit and ride sharing, a growing number of transportation management agencies and local businesses are finding new opportunities to team up and contribute to community sustainability.

Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC), a national partnership sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation, includes over 1,500 employers, transportation management agencies, and other organizations. Located in communities throughout the country, the partnership offers over 3 million workers commuter benefits such as transit subsidies, vanpool services, telecommuting arrangements, and parking cash-out options, among others. These benefits also help reduce gasoline consumption and traffic congestion, increase transit use, and prevent air pollution.

Recent EPA program data show that employees offered a high-quality commuter benefits package are 20 percent more likely than those not offered such benefits to commute to work by a means other than driving. Additional data show that on average, BWC employers experience a shift of 15 percent away from drive-alone commuting patterns compared with other area employers.

Businesses, transportation management agencies, and other community organizations can elect to start a BWC program, or those already offering commuter benefits can apply to join one. Among the benefits of partnering with EPA are greater public recognition and heightened visibility for their commuter benefits programs, and access to technical assistance and networking opportunities that can help communities connect and share their experiences in efforts to establish a sustainable transportation system.

An extensive, high-frequency bus system (right) and access to bike and pedestrian paths are key to sustainable transportation in Boulder, Colorado. Hacienda Business Park offers a shuttle service to and from a nearby BART station to all park employees and residents (below). Both are Best Workplaces for Commuters districts.



NEIL PARKER



HACIENDA BUSINESS PARK

"Downtown Boulder has a master plan with clear sustainable transportation goals," explains Jan Ward, a transportation coordinator for Boulder, Colorado. "Nonetheless, we need opportunities to connect to the world outside of Boulder, nationally and globally. Becoming a Best Workplaces for Commuters District has helped us tremendously."

Downtown Boulder partners with EPA as a BWC District, which groups employers located near one another in order to provide commuter benefits to all employees in an area. The

benefits are made available through one central entity, such as a city transportation agency.

To date, EPA has granted the BWC District designation to 20 locations covering 600,000 employees. These districts qualify for the designation by meeting the EPA's National Standard of Excellence for providing commuting alternatives to all employees in the district. This kind of large-scale program, which can cover tens of thousands of employees, allows the districts to provide much more comprehensive services

and the ability to work with local and regional transit agencies to improve choices for the companies and employees.

The EPA standard includes that employees are offered one or more of the following primary benefits:

- ▷ a vanpool or transit subsidy of at least \$30 per month;
- ▷ a telecommuting program that reduces commuter trips by 6 percent;
- ▷ a program offering \$30 per month to employees who leave their car at home and commute another way; or
- ▷ an employer program that delivers equivalent environmental results.

Employees also must be offered three or more supporting benefits, which can include:

- ▷ ride-share matching services;
- ▷ bicycle parking with lockers;
- ▷ coordinated outreach;
- ▷ local partnerships; or
- ▷ on-site amenities, such as a café.